



File Code: 1950

Date: February 8, 2021

Dear Friends of the Clinch Ranger District,

The USDA Forest Service, is seeking comments in regards to a wildlife habitat improvement proposal across the Clinch Ranger District in Dickenson, Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties in Virginia.

Purpose and Need for the Project

The purpose of this project is to maintain early successional, herbaceous habitat for browse and cover for species such as wild turkey, whitetail deer, and many other small mammal species. If this project is not implemented this habitat will fade from the landscape as trees and nonnative invasives like autumn olive encroach and eventually shade out this habitat type.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing to maintain existing wildlife clearings on the District by implementing the following actions:

- Mow or brush hog up to 60 acres annually. This is to be accomplished with a tractor or other approved non-chemical methods to remove brush and prevent tree encroachment;
- Disk and seed up to 15 acres annually to promote desired native plants and to maintain a beneficial herbaceous state.
- Prescribed burn up to 25 acres annually to promote desired native plants and to maintain a beneficial herbaceous state.

The appropriate treatment and location will be selected by professional judgment of a biologist or natural resource specialist based on the existing state of the clearings and occur on a rotational basis over the next ten years. Clearings may be retreated every two to three years to maintain the desired state.



Decision to be Made

We anticipate this proposal to be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under 36 CFR 220.6(e):

Category 6: *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.* 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6)

The responsible official for the decision will be the District Ranger for the Clinch Ranger District. The decision to be made is whether the proposed habitat improvement activities should occur across the Clinch Ranger District. The project is subject to design criteria and Management Prescription limitations identified during the analysis phase.

Public Involvement

As a result of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Public Law No. 113-76) and the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill, Public Law No. 102-381), the Forest Service will no longer offer appeal opportunities for categorically excluded projects. However, we will continue to offer public involvement opportunities for these projects and will take public comments into consideration before final decisions are made. Therefore, we welcome your involvement and encourage your comments on this proposal. Comments received, including names and contact information of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Written comments concerning this proposal will be accepted through Monday, February 22, 2021. Comments may be submitted through the Clinch Wildlife Clearing Improvement Project website via the web form:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=59443>

This web form can also be accessed from the project website:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=59443>

On the right side, you can select "Comment/Object on Project."

Written comments can also be submitted hardcopy to:

USDA Forest Service
ATTN: Michelle Davalos, District Ranger
1700 Park Ave SW
Norton, VA 24273



Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx).

Please share any specific concerns that you feel need to be considered within the context of this proposed action. Make your comments as concise as you can and address the proposed action specifically. State “Clinch Wildlife Clearing Improvement Project” in the subject line when providing electronic objections, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

If you have questions about this proposal please contact Chuck Lane, Project Leader at (276) 679-8370, or by email at charles.lane@usda.gov. Thank you for your interest in the management of your National Forests.

Sincerely,

/s/ *Michelle W. Davalos*

MICHELLE W. DAVALOS
Clinch District Ranger

